

Van Heflin, Oscar Winner, Dies at 60

BY DAVID SHAW

Times Staff Writer

Van Heflin, longtime character actor who generally portrayed tough guys who were more sensitive and vulnerable than their snarling manner initially implied, died Friday in a Los Angeles hospital. He was 60.

Mr. Heflin suffered a heart attack June 6 while swimming in his apartment pool and was taken to the hospital unconscious and in extremely critical condition. He never regained consciousness.

There will be a private cremation of the body, and the ashes will be scattered at sea, in accord with Mr. Heflin's wishes. He directed also that there be no funeral or memorial service of any nature.

Mr. Heflin won an Academy Award as best supporting actor in 1942 for his role as the hard-drinking stooge for a big-city gangster in "Johnny Eager."

A seaman in his youth and early

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manhood, he got his start in show business by accident when, in New York, he met director Richard Boleslawski, who cast him on Broadway in "Mr. Moneybags."

The play closed after a short run, and Mr. Heflin shipped out again for three years, only to return to drama school and take up acting for good.

In 1936, after appearing in eight more Broadway plays, he made his first



Van Heflin

Times photo

movie, "A Woman Rebels."

Over the next 35 years, he performed in such films as "Battle Cry," "Pat-

terns," "Three Musketeers," "Shane," "The Greatest Story Ever Told" and "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

He starred on Broadway and in Hollywood in the 1960s, playing in the hit stage production "A Case of Libel" and—in his last movie—played the World War II demolitions expert gone half-mad and determined to blow up a plane in the box office smash "Airport."

'Never Same Part'

The role was in many ways typically Van Heflin—though he often insisted there was no such thing.

"I've never played the same part twice," he said once. "I'm a character actor, always have been."

Nevertheless, he almost always played a supporting character, seemingly hard-bitten, but possessed of a certain vulnerability

beneath the rugged facade; a weakness that ultimately brought him to bad ends.

Ross Hunter, his producer on "Airport," said:

"I've never known a kinder, simpler, more understanding man. People didn't realize this — his talent overshadowed it all."

Health Fan

Mr. Heflin, who was taking his daily 20 laps in the pool when he suffered the heart attack, was an ardent health enthusiast in his later years.

Mr. Heflin and his wife of 25 years, actress Frances Neal, were divorced in 1967. He is survived by the three children of that marriage—Mrs. Vana O'Brien of Cambridge, Mass., Mrs. Cathleen Westbrook of San Francisco and his son, Tracy Neal, 17.